



Employers can help slow the spread of COVID-19

Employer Guidance

COVID-19 is a very contagious respiratory illness that can spread from person to person. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the droplets can remain active in the air for hours or on surfaces for days. The virus has spread quickly internationally, including to the United States.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19 and no medicine to treat the virus, only the symptoms. Symptoms include a dry cough, fever and shortness of breath. While 80% of the people who contract COVID-19 have mild to moderate symptoms and fully recover, it can cause serious or fatal medical complications for older people and people with underlying health

conditions or compromised immune systems. Some people who contract COVID-19 have no symptoms ([asymptomatic](#)), but are still contagious and a serious threat to high risk people.

COVID-19 is a dangerous disease, but it can be prevented by practicing social distancing and good hygiene. While it is safest to stay home, many businesses are identified as Essential and must remain open. Employers and employees each have a role in helping prevent workplace exposures to COVID-19, in non-healthcare settings, and slowing the spread of this virus in our community.

Steps to Minimize the Risk of COVID-19 in the Workplace

Maintain a Healthy Work Environment

- Employees should practice social distancing with fellow employees, customers and visitors, stay 6 feet apart.
- Promote proper hygiene: wash hands frequently, cover coughs and sneezes with tissues, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects.
- The CDC is now recommending people wear [cloth face coverings](#) in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. New evidence shows a significant portion of individuals with coronavirus lack symptoms (“asymptomatic”) and that even those who eventually develop symptoms (“pre-symptomatic”) can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity—for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms.
- Employees who have COVID-19 [symptoms](#) (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home.
- Employees who arrive sick or become sick at work, with the above symptoms, should

- immediately be separated from other employees, customers, and visitors and sent home.
- Some employees may be at [higher risk for serious illness](#), such as [older adults](#), those with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women. Consider minimizing face-to-face contact between these employees or assign work tasks that allow them to maintain a distance of six feet from other workers, customers and visitors, or to telework if possible.
 - Sick employees should not return to work until the criteria to [discontinue home isolation](#) are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.
 - Employees who are well, but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19, should notify their supervisor and follow [CDC recommended precautions](#).
 - If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace, but maintain confidentiality of the infected employee as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Fellow employees should then self-monitor for [symptoms](#) (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath).
 - To prevent stigma and discrimination in the workplace, use only the guidance described above to determine risk of COVID-19 infection. Do not make determinations of risk based on race or country of origin.
 - See [OSHA COVID-19](#) webpage for more information on how to protect workers from potential exposures and risk levels in different jobs.

Support health and hand hygiene for employees, customers, and worksite visitors:

- Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles.
- Provide soap and water in the workplace. If soap and water are not readily available, provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol. If hands are visibly dirty, soap and water should be chosen over hand sanitizer. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained.
- Place hand sanitizers in multiple locations to encourage hand washing.
- Place posters that encourage [hand hygiene](#) to [help stop the spread](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
- Discourage handshaking – encourage the use of other noncontact methods of greeting.
- Direct employees to visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.

Perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfection:

- Routinely clean and disinfect all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs.
- If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For disinfection, most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. A list of products that are EPA-approved for use against the virus that causes COVID-19 is available at [epa.gov](#). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, etc.).
- Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use. Have disposable disinfecting wipes readily available for employees so they can clean commonly used surfaces and objects (such as doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, other work tools and equipment) before each use. To disinfect, [use products that meet EPA's criteria for use against SARS-Cov-2](#)[external icon](#), the cause of COVID-19, and are appropriate for the surface.

- Perform enhanced cleaning and disinfection after people suspected/confirmed to have COVID-19 have been in the facility. If a sick employee is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, [follow the CDC cleaning and disinfection recommendations](#).
- Install high-efficiency air filters.
- If possible, increase ventilation rates in the work environment.
- Install physical barriers, such as clear plastic sneeze guards

Employer Policies to Promote Employee Wellness

- Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of and understand these policies.
- Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member or take care of children due to school and childcare closures. Additional flexibilities might include giving advances on future sick leave and allowing employees to donate sick leave to each other.
- Employers that do not currently offer sick leave to some or all of their employees may want to draft non-punitive “emergency sick leave” policies.
- Employers should not require a positive COVID-19 test result or a healthcare provider’s note for employees who are sick to validate their illness, qualify for sick leave, or to return to work. Healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely manner.
- Review human resources policies to make sure that policies and practices are consistent with public health recommendations and are consistent with existing state and federal workplace laws (for more information on employer responsibilities, visit the [Department of Labor](#) and the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s](#) websites).
- Connect employees to employee assistance program (EAP) resources (if available) and community resources as needed. Employees may need additional social, behavioral, and other services, for example, to cope with the death of a loved one.

Consider establishing policies and practices for social distancing, maintaining a distance of 6 feet or 2 meters from others when possible (e.g., breakrooms and cafeterias).

Strategies that businesses could use include:

- Implementing flexible worksites (e.g., telework)
- Implementing flexible work hours (e.g., staggered shifts)
- Increasing physical space between employees at the worksite
- Increasing physical space between employees and customers (e.g., drive through, partitions)
- Implementing flexible meeting and travel options (e.g., postpone non-essential meetings or events)
- Downsizing operations
- Delivering services remotely (e.g. phone, video, or web)
- Delivering products through curbside pick-up or delivery

Maintain Healthy Business Operations

- Identify a workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 issues and their impact on the workplace.
- Assess your essential functions and the reliance that others and the community have on your

services or products.

- Be prepared to change your business practices if needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., identify alternative suppliers, prioritize existing customers, or temporarily suspend some of your operations if needed).
- Identify alternate supply chains for critical goods and services. Some goods and services may be in higher demand or unavailable.
- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Talk with business partners about your response plans. Share best practices with other businesses in your communities (especially those in your supply chain), chambers of commerce and associations to improve community response efforts.

Planning for Absenteeism

- Determine how you will operate if absenteeism spikes from increases in sick employees, those who stay home to care for sick family members, and those who must stay home to watch their children
- Implement plans to continue your essential business functions in case you experience higher than usual absenteeism.
- Prepare to institute flexible workplace and leave policies.
- Cross-train employees to perform essential functions so the workplace can operate even if key employees are absent.

Employee Travel

- Check the [CDC's Traveler's Health Notices](#) for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from countries with travel advisories, and information for aircrew, can be found on the [CDC website](#).
- Be aware, some states are issuing their own travel restrictions and travel quarantine orders, so check before you travel out of state.



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